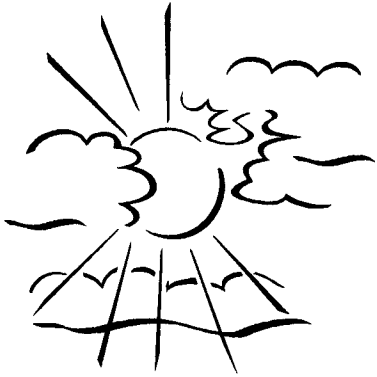


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Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, June 20, 2005

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Published June 19, 2005

School funds top priority, readers say Many prefer tax hikes over state budget cuts

By Stacey Range
Lansing State Journal
June 19, 2005

Educating Michigan children and providing health care for the poor, elderly and disabled are the most important state functions and should be protected from cuts, readers say. Concerned that five years of budget cuts have slashed state services to unacceptable levels, many readers said they're willing to pay more in taxes and fees to preserve what's important to them.

"We pay more for houses, cars and clothes. Why shouldn't we pay more for state services, too?" asked Carol Ann Thomas, a retired high school math teacher.

The Lansing woman was among 471 people who offered their opinions about Michigan's budget problems in a Lansing State Journal survey this month.

The unscientific survey ran in the June 5-9 newspapers and was posted online through last Monday.

It asked readers for their thoughts on everything from which areas to cut and preserve to whether they are willing to pay more in taxes.

And with state lawmakers mired in Michigan's fifth consecutive year of spending cuts, there were plenty of opinions.

"We have to do something," Paul Smith of Westphalia said. "The budget is taxed to the max right now. I don't see where we can cut any more without drastically cutting state services." Gov. Jennifer Granholm and lawmakers are battling now over how best to address a \$773 million shortfall in the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

Republican leaders want to cut Medicaid benefits and welfare payments to avoid any tax increases. Granholm and Democrats say that's balancing the budget on the backs of the poor. But balancing next year's budget won't be easy, especially because so many programs - from adult dental care for Michigan's poor to summer school programs for children falling behind - already have been cut to eliminate a multibillion dollar deficit in recent years.

The worst-hit program, readers said, has been Medicaid. Given five budget areas, 244 respondents chose the health care program covering 1.4 million of Michigan's poor and disabled as the area that has received the harshest treatment under recent cuts.

Most readers said K-12 education, higher education and aid to cities and townships have been treated fairly.

The Corrections Department, one of the few departments to get a spending increase over the past five years, was the only one of the five areas where more than 100 readers said it has been treated very well in the recent budget crisis.

The prison system, which is costing the state \$1.8 billion this year, is the area respondents said they would cut first.

"In times like this you have to stick with the basics," Smith, a Lansing firefighter said.

"Releasing nonviolent offenders is a good place to start."

Priority 1: Education

Almost half of respondents (47 percent) said funding K-12 education should be the state's top priority.

Phil Sims, a 45-year-old factory worker from Grand Ledge, has two children in public elementary school.

"They're cutting where it's most crucial," Sims said. "We need to protect our children."

In education, 72 percent said they would rather eliminate a program that gives laptop computers to middle-school students than end hearing and vision tests for preschool students or cut per-pupil funding.

Fifteen percent said teacher health care benefits should be cut.

Only 2 percent, or 11 people, agreed with Granholm's proposal to end school bus inspections.

Opinions were mixed on what to do about higher education.

Readers were almost equally divided between maintaining the current funding level of \$2 billion this year, cutting funding and letting schools make up the difference by raising tuition, and giving more to schools by raising taxes.

They did not, however, want the state to give community colleges and universities more money by taking it away from other programs. Only 49 people, or 10 percent of respondents, thought that should happen.

Marie Robke was among them. The 24-year-old Haslett woman has racked up \$17,000 in student loans attending Michigan Student University and Lansing Community College.

And she still has a few years before she gets her degree to teach special education.

"People want everyone educated, but they don't want to pay for it," Robke said. "Everyone should help out everyone else."

Higher taxes and fees

Perhaps the most surprising finding was the 292 people, or 62 percent, who said they prefer raising taxes and fees to more cuts.

Twenty-four percent said taxes should stay at current levels even though it means further spending cuts, and 13 percent said taxes are too high and should be cut.

In another question, 99 people said they believe the state should raise the income tax.

Sims, who works for a company in Williamston that makes auto parts, said he would support raising taxes only if he could trust that it would be spent well, such as for public schools.

"I don't have a problem paying more in taxes if it means better services," Sims said.

"But there's still a lot of government waste."

One area he believes should be cut is chiropractic services for Medicaid recipients; 206 other readers agreed with him.

Medicaid was the second highest vote-getter in terms of spending priorities, with 29 percent of readers ranking it as the most important budget area.

But 44 percent said the health program's burgeoning costs should be lowered by ending optional services, such as chiropractic care.

Thomas, the retired teacher, said she feels for the poor and disabled who have been cut from Medicaid and those who might have to pay premiums and higher co-pays under a Republican plan.

"Those kinds of cuts are very hurtful for these people," she said.

"They are not just a piece of paper. They are people."

Readers also didn't like another Republican budget-balancing plan to drop monthly welfare checks by an average of \$50 each.

The plan also would end cash assistance to about 15,000 families statewide who have been getting aid for four or more years.

Most survey respondents, 43 percent, said the current payment levels are about right.

Another 133 readers said a single mother of three should be getting more than \$5,500 a year in welfare benefits.

Another 127 people said benefits are too high.

A whopping 84 percent said the legislative budget should be cut. Many are still upset about a combined 40 percent raise lawmakers got in 2001 and 2002.

Sally Bondy of Lansing is among them.

In an e-mail to the State Journal, Bondy wrote: "Why don't the governor, Legislature and others who work 'for the people' take a pay cut and live like the rest of us?"

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or srange@lsj.com.

Published June 19, 2005

Lansing State Journal reader survey on the state budget

A total of 471 readers responded to a Lansing State Journal survey this month about the state budget. The results are unscientific.

1. Programs in several budget areas are slated for cuts this year.

47% -- K-12 education

12% -- Higher education

4% -- Corrections

29% -- Medicaid services for the poor, senior citizens and people with disabilities

7% -- Aid to cities and townships

1% -- No response

2. Which would you cut first?

4% -- K-12 education

20% -- Higher education

41% -- Corrections

8% -- Medicaid services for the poor, senior citizens and people with disabilities

26% -- Aid to cities and townships

1% -- No response

3. In the past few years, state government has made budget cuts to eliminate a multibillion dollar deficit. How well do you think these areas have been treated?

• K-12 education

15% -- Very well

41% -- Satisfactorily

40% -- Poorly

3% -- No response

• Higher education

17% -- Very well

48% -- Satisfactorily

31% -- Poorly

4% -- No response

- Corrections
 - 28% -- Very well
 - 50% -- Satisfactorily
 - 17% -- Poorly
 - 5% -- No response
- Medicaid services for the poor, senior citizens and people with disabilities
 - 9% -- Very well
 - 35% -- Satisfactorily
 - 52% -- Poorly
 - 4% -- No response
- Aid to cities and townships
 - 10% -- Very well
 - 55% -- Satisfactorily
 - 30% -- Poorly
 - 5% -- No response

4. In the past few years, cigarette taxes have been raised while the income tax and Single Business Tax rates were cut. Which best describes your opinion about state taxes?

13% -- Taxes are too high and should be cut even though it means more budget cuts.

62% -- Budget cuts have reduced services beyond acceptable levels, and taxes or fees should be raised to protect critical services.

24% -- Taxes should stay at this level even though further spending cuts will be necessary.

1% -- No response

5. Thirty years ago the state paid 70 percent of higher education costs. Today state funding accounts for about 40 percent.

10% -- Contribute more by cutting other programs.

31% -- Contribute more by raising taxes.

31% -- Contribute the same amount.

26% -- Reduce the payment and let schools raise tuition because students are making investments that will lead to better paying jobs.

1% -- No response

6. Which would you rather see cut?

4% -- Per-pupil funding

72% -- Laptop program for middle school students

5% -- Hearing and vision screenings for children

15% -- Teacher health care benefits

- Arts grants
 - 52% -- Cut
 - 38% -- Continued at current levels
 - 7% -- Increased
 - 3% -- No response
- Legislative budget
 - 84% -- Cut
 - 14% -- Continued at current levels
 - 1% -- Increased
 - 1% -- No response
- Executive budget
 - 69% -- Cut
 - 27% -- Continued at current levels
 - 3% -- Increased
 - 1% -- No response
- Tax breaks to businesses
 - 39% -- Cut
 - 45% -- Continued at current levels
 - 14% -- Increased
 - 2% -- No response
- Roads
 - 4% -- Cut
 - 58% -- Continued at current levels
 - 37% -- Increased
 - 2% -- No response
- Senior services
 - 10% -- Cut
 - 62% -- Continued at current levels
 - 25% -- Increased
 - 3% -- No response
- State employee benefits
 - 17% -- Cut
 - 66% -- Continued at current levels
 - 14% -- Increased
 - 2% -- No response
- Merit awards
 - 50% -- Cut
 - 42% -- Continued at current levels
 - 6% -- Increased
 - 2% -- No response
- Scholarships to private colleges
 - 72% -- Cut
 - 25% -- Continued at current levels
 - 2% -- Increased
 - 1% -- No response
- Teacher benefits

23% -- Cut

61% -- Continued at current levels

14% -- Increased

1% -- No response

12. A number of ideas have been floated for changing Michigan's tax structure. You think the state should:

16% -- Adopt Granholm's plan to lower the Single Business Tax rate and raise taxes on insurance companies.

13% -- Cut all business taxes to improve the business climate and cut state spending further.

21% -- Raise the income tax.

16% -- Lower the sales tax from 6 percent to 5 percent but expand it to services that currently aren't taxed.

3% -- Impose a tax on physicians to collect more federal money and increase Medicaid payments to providers.

30% -- Raise the tax on landfills to discourage Canada from dumping its trash in Michigan.

1% -- No response

What you said:

I am not in favor of this legislation and, in fact, am appalled at the lack of compassion shown to the poorest residents of this state. ... I would like to see one of our legislators with two children try to live on \$5,000 a year.

I can hardly believe the quote from Rick Jones, my representative, that people will move into Michigan because of our higher welfare payments. That is ludicrous.

We are talking about people with limited intelligence or education, most likely with medical or psychological problems, who will be without even a meager stipend from the state.

I worked in the public welfare system for years and can hardly believe what our Legislature is doing to the Medicaid program and now this.

When are they going to wake up and realize we need more money? This constant babble about lowering taxes or not raising taxes just means cuts in state programs, and that has been going on for years. The safety net for poor people is shredding, and the powers that be don't seem to care.

— **Carol Ranville**
Charlotte

LSJ
6/19
2B



CAPITOL QUESTION: Welfare changes in Michigan

Capitol Question is an opportunity for readers to voice their opinions on questions before the Legislature and state government. Responses run Sundays.

What we asked:

House Republicans passed a 2006 budget bill that would stop welfare payments after four years of assistance beginning Jan. 1. Do you agree with that?

I believe it should be stopped every year, not every four years. It should be reexamined every year. ... People live from one generation to another in a lot of cases, and people who need assistance can't get it.

— **Evelyn Sisco**
Eaton Rapids

I do not agree with the proposed changes to the welfare program in Michigan. Many working mothers are struggling to make ends meet, jumping

through humiliating governmental hoops to demonstrate need and placing children in substandard day care in order to go to work in accordance with the "welfare to work" laws.

Many of these mothers have disabilities or lack the education or skills necessary to earn enough to support a family. It is absurd to believe that any woman would choose to live at a subsistence level, visit the food bank to feed her children, and face mountains of forms and requirements because they want, in the

words of state Rep. (Jerry) Kooiman, to avoid "doing what they need to do."

No compassionate person can deny that the children of the poor are entitled to have enough to eat, a safe place to live, and the time and attention of a loving parent. ...

I pray that we choose, as a society, to protect rather than punish families in need of help.

— **Ann Graham Nichols**
East Lansing

I do not agree with the House Republicans changing welfare.

I volunteer in a homeless shelter, and there are single moms with children, and they work part of the time, and they are dependent on welfare since there aren't intact families to help them (and there aren't other social services readily available).

This is the only thing that's keeping these children from disaster, so I think the House did one of the most mean-spirited things it could do by introducing that bill.

— **Susan Anderson**
Okemos

If a person is able physically and mentally to work, then I think it would behoove us to remove them from the welfare

rolls. However, should there be a problem with their health in one way or another, possibly each case needs to be looked at individually.

— **M. Joyce D'Valentine**
East Lansing

No, I don't agree with that; I think that's a terrible thing. Whatever happened to the compassionate right? That's such an oxymoron. ... How stupid is this? Republicans are so, so wrong.

— **Janelle Craig**
Okemos

I completely disagree with that. I think it's a little short of criminal to cut off the payments after four years.

— **Laura Potter**
Lansing

This week's question: Virtual hunting

The state House has passed legislation to ban hunting using a remote-operated weapon, a measure designed to stop Internet hunting. A Texas resident has a Web site that allows people to operate a remote-operated rifle using a video camera showing animals at his ranch. Would you support such a ban? Why or why not?

Please respond by noon Thursday, and include a telephone number for verification.

You can

• Call 485-5463, and press 8978 to leave a voice-mail message.

• E-mail
capquestion@lansing.gannett.com

Janeile Cannon: To legislators, only Wal-Mart is 'needy'

How proud the right-wing faithful must be in crafting Michigan's 2006 budget. I refer to the likes of Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, Rep. Scott Hummel, R-DeWitt and Rep. Bruce Caswell, R-Hillsdale. With all the regret and zeal of Caligula, they simply can't resist taxing the poorest of the poor so that Wal-Mart can build a nice new big box distribution center in Isabella County. Before they impose the tax (euphemistically tagged as a co-pay,) they first want to throw 43,000 women and children to the lions by cutting them off from assistance, including health care under Medicaid DeRoche, with puzzling political ignorance, compared the budget cuts to tuning into Discovery Channel programming featuring sharks ("Shark Week"). He wanted us all to wait in anticipation to see who was going to get eviscerated first.

True to a shark's nature, the weakest flounders among us got it broadside. The budget details are gory and ghastly.

Cropsey must be so proud he insisted the corporate identity be secret when raiding transportation dollars for everyone's favorite corporate charity case - Wal-Mart.

Hummel, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said that he preferred to focus on what was in the budget - and not what was being cut. I wouldn't look either if I was turning thumbs down to more than 36,000 shivering children who won't have heat this coming winter. Caswell said the new and higher Medicaid co-pays are only fair considering what taxpayers pay to provide Medicaid coverage: "The taxpayers are stepping forward for these folks - they can do a little bit more."

A little bit more? Out of what? That great big \$405 welfare check they are scraping by on? Do these men think that these families are just lounging around, living in the lap of idleness eating macaroni and cheese every night? This is proof that the term-limited legislators are woefully ignorant of the reality of poverty.

Don't these legislators think that the Engler policies of the last decade, still in operation, would have found a way to make these families independent?

Here's an idea: Let's put them all on a bus and send them to Wal-Mart in Isabella County, where taxpayers are just chomping at the bit to give Wal-Mart a tax break and a brand new road, just to help the poor, struggling retailer get by in this sorry economy. Surely, Wal-Mart will pay a living wage, provide health care for all their part-time workers, and day care for their children, right? And to all you Sadducee and Pharisee legislators, I remind you that Jesus admonished you to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and care for the sick. What you do to the least of these, you also do to Jesus.

And to the voters who consistently elect Caligula's horse as a senator or representative, wake up! Those torches aflame in the Capitol chambers are innocent children skewered on the rods of greed and corruption.

Lansing State Journal
Letters to the editor

June 20, 2005

Where's compassion?

In reference to your June 12 editorial on the Republican House budget bill:
Their budget bill is punitive to 43,000 low-income residents on welfare and Medicaid. The majority on welfare are children; an estimated 36,000, including 27,000 under 12, according to the Department of Human Services. These households generally are female-headed households of four - one adult and three children.

The House GOP's plan to cut aid to low-income residents on welfare and Medicaid is a further example of the hypocrisy of their doctrine of "compassionate conservatism."

F. Donald Halm
Okemos

Michigan Report
June 17, 2005

HOUSE, SENATE TO REJECT BUDGETS QUICKLY

Having used different methods to construct their plans for the state budget, the House and Senate have decided to move each other's budget bills into conference committees speedily so negotiations can begin as soon as possible.

The House will take the 17 budget bills passed by the Senate and simply strip out funding in each one to turn them into shell bills, said Matt Resch, spokesperson for House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Nov). The House will then pass each bill, sending them back to the Senate, which will reject the House changes, sending them to conference committees.

The Senate will do the same with the House's two budget bills.

What remains unanswered is how the two chambers will reconcile the number of bills. The Senate's 17 bills reflect the traditional process of essentially giving each department and major budget area its own bill. The House implemented a new process this year with an omnibus bill that contained nearly all funding for state government. A second bill contains several K-12 funding programs and is pending on the House floor.

Neither chamber has acted on a bill for capital outlay.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Advisory

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Area Residents Impacted by Proposed Budget Cuts to Meet with Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow

June 20, 2005

GRAND RAPIDS – Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow will visit Kent County on Tuesday to talk with local residents who will be impacted by budget cuts proposed by the legislature.

Director Udow will visit with residents on **Tuesday, June 21 at 1:00 p.m.** at the Kent County DHS office at 415 Franklin St. SE in Grand Rapids. Udow will be joined by Kent County DHS Director Andrew Zylstra and local legislators have been invited as well.

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has called the proposed Republican budget "unprecedented" in its cruelty and has called on Republicans to close corporate tax loopholes instead of making devastating cuts that will hurt children, families and our economy.

Media are invited to participate in this roundtable discussion.

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Area Residents Impacted by Proposed Budget Cuts to Meet with Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow

June 20, 2005

LANSING – Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow will visit Ingham County on Tuesday to talk with local residents who will be impacted by budget cuts proposed by the legislature.

Director Udow will visit with residents on **Tuesday, June 21 at 3:30 p.m.** at the Ingham County DHS office at 5303 S. Cedar St. in Lansing. Udow will be joined by Ingham County DHS Director Susan Hull and local legislators have been invited as well.

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has called the proposed Republican budget “unprecedented” in its cruelty and has called on Republicans to close corporate tax loopholes instead of making devastating cuts that will hurt children, families and our economy.

Media are invited to participate in this roundtable discussion.

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Health-habit subsidies

Thursday, June 16, 2005

Concerned that Medicaid may be subsidizing destructive health habits, the state Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Community Health came up with a plan to encourage Medicaid recipients to kick unhealthy habits. In concept, this is an excellent move.

Under the plan, Medicaid patients would sign "personal responsibility agreements" regarding their health. The agreement would specify certain actions the patient would be expected to take. These would include not smoking, having a personal health assessment annually, getting one's child immunized, and showing up for health-care appointments.

Here's the real motivator, though: Patients would pay an average \$5 monthly premium for their Medicaid coverage, but those with poor health habits would pay more. While some states already charge a co-pay for certain groups of Medicaid patients, Michigan's personal-responsibility agreements would require a waiver from the federal government.

Conceptually, we have no problem with this proposal. It hits the right chord: Everyone -- including Medicaid patients -- should take personal responsibility for his or her health care. Michigan's Medicaid program cost \$7 billion last year, and that amount is growing much faster than revenue growth. Thus, it wouldn't hurt even the disadvantaged in the Medicaid program to have a stakeholder interest in maintaining good health. The net result would be to suppress Medicaid spending driven by poor health practices, as well as improve the health of recipients.

However, our one concern is a practical one. Once people sign a personal responsibility agreement, how does the state ensure they are honoring it? This could not be enforced by any ordinary means. It would require a certain level of bureaucracy to verify compliance.

If that can be done, this is a good concept and well worth pursuing.

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Bad Rx: Targeting poor a dangerous precedent Needy to pay price of Medicaid makeover

Sunday, June 19, 2005

Ann Arbor News

Editorial

Cruelty is no virtue, but bills pushed by Republican state lawmakers that would increase the burden on Michigan's poor suggest otherwise.

The GOP in Lansing last week was busy congratulating itself on measures that would take Medicaid, the state's health program for the destitute and disabled, and squeeze it:

The Republican House plan calls for removing benefits for 43,000 residents, including 30,000 who receive them because they care for a low-income child on Medicaid, and to some 13,000 single 19- and 20-year-olds.

The Republican Senate plan introduces a sliding scale that would levy premiums averaging \$60 a year on Medicaid's recipients and begin charging them a portion for brand-name prescriptions.

Either bill, the Republicans say, would help the state balance its increasingly chronically deficit-ridden budget. The House's plan would save \$144 million. The Senate plan, about \$53 million.

With the budget at \$40 billion, the balancing claims seem overstated. What the Republican plans are more than capable of doing, however, is presenting a major threat to Michigan's most vulnerable populations. The reason can be found in this statement from Midland Republican Sen. Tony Stamas, who helped write the Senate's health department budget: "This is an important first step forward."

Indeed, in other states where Medicaid is under siege, it has taken hits that often follow this pattern: a few initial jabs followed in succeeding years by some powerful coverage-flattening wallops.

That's what we fear happening in Michigan. Eliminating benefits for some groups or charging others premiums and higher copays for drugs sets a dangerous precedent. What before was unthinkable because it would have meant Michigan no longer considers it critically important to care for those who financially can't care for themselves next becomes, "Well, we made some modest cuts last year and the state didn't crumble. We can make some more again this year, and next year..."

We don't minimize the enormous cost to states of providing Medicaid, which they fund jointly with the federal government. Costs nationally have jumped more than 60 percent in the last five years, topping \$300 billion annually. So heavy has the burden to states become that several Democratic governors joined their GOP counterparts in asking Congress last week to embrace states having broad discretion to set premiums, deductibles and copayments for recipients.

Yet some Congress members, like Rep. John Dingell, D-Dearborn, saw the governors' proposals for what they were. They would "shift costs to the poorest and most vulnerable citizens," he said, causing thousands to fall through states' health care safety nets. We believe states would do better to exhaust options for reducing administrative overhead. Larger discounts from drug manufacturers and pharmacies for prescription drugs and more bulk purchasing also would help.

Way past time for reform: Health care costs are killing us

Bay City Times

Sunday, June 19, 2005

The price of staying alive and well is strangling our health care system.

It's killing Michigan.

The economy of the entire United States is driven to its knees under the staggering burden of paying for medical care.

It's long past time to reform how we pay for - and provide - health care.

Yet lawmakers in Washington, D.C., wring their hands over every issue but health care.

And in Lansing, our state leaders propose remedies for the state budget that may only make the health care funding crisis worse.

Earlier this year, Gov. Jennifer Granholm proposed a 2.3 percent tax on Michigan physicians.

This month, the Michigan House and Senate began acting on Granholm's recommendations to cut Medicaid reimbursements to doctors 4 percent and to hospitals by \$200 million.

These ideas are prescriptions for disaster.

Physicians and hospitals already carry the state's Medicaid burden. The money they get from the program for treating the poor hasn't covered the costs of providing medical service for years.

So, to stay in business, doctors and hospitals pass on these costs to their other, privately insured patients.

And, naturally, insurance companies raise their rates to cover their increased costs.

Finally, companies that pay these insurance rates have a few distasteful choices to cover their premiums: Raise the price of their products, force employees to pay for part of their insurance,

drop health insurance altogether or lay off workers.

Those uninsured and laid off workers end up on Medicaid.

When they seek a doctor's help, the whole spiral of under-reimbursed costs takes another turn.

It's tempting to cut Medicaid. In Michigan last year, it cost more than \$7 billion - about a quarter of all state spending.

Yet, it's clear that cutting Medicaid, or taxing health care to pay for it, only feeds the all-consuming beast that our system of medical care has become.

Many people are amazed - we are appalled - that some estimates show that as much as \$1,500 of the sticker price of every General Motors Corp. car is for health care costs.

Company owners and CEOs nationwide cite rising health care costs as a roadblock to an improved economy.

This cannot continue.

Continued funding cuts to government health care programs only make matters worse.

Our state and national leaders need to do the right thing. We must reform our health care system.

We need to discuss how we, as a people, will provide health care. And how we will pay for it.

What we have now - a crazy free-for-all of free enterprise, charity and government subsidies and mandates - isn't working.

It's destroying itself and dragging down the entire economy.

The health care funding system that is eating this country alive needs to be tamed.

Our very survival - as individuals, as a state, as a nation - demands it.

End of a Viagran dole

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Thursday, June 16, 2005

The very notion of Medicaid-subsidized Viagra is an outrage. Why should taxpayers, whose federal and state governments stagger beneath ballooning entitlement programs, be handing out Viagra to Medicaid recipients?

Yet our restrained outrage wasn't fully informed of the worst of the Viagran scandal. It appears that state after state has learned, to its chagrin, that sex offenders are on Medicaid. So yes, some of them have been getting the little blue pills, courtesy of the taxpayers.

Florida recently announced it had provided Viagra and other impotence pills to 218 sex offenders over the past four years. Three-quarters of the offenders were guilty of crimes against minors. Think of that statistic in light of some of Florida's recent, nationally prominent sex crimes against children.

In New York, a state official discovered that 198 sex offenders had been supplied with Viagra since 2000. His letter to the federal agency regulating Medicaid prompted a May 23 federal directive that permits states to withhold this gratuity from sex offenders.

That May 23 letter prompted Michigan officials to do a cross-search of the state's Medicaid rolls and its sex-offender registry. Of 300 prescriptions for Viagra since December, seven went to people on the sex-offender registry. To keep in compliance with the federal directive, in the future background checks will be done to ensure erectile-dysfunction drugs aren't going to Michigan sex offenders.

This is good news. Yet there's still the problem of other Medicaid recipients getting Viagra. Seven prescriptions were clearly inappropriate. But what about the rest of the 300 prescriptions? Taxpayer should not have to spend a dime to enhance anyone's sexual desire. That's not a legitimate safety-net health issue; that's bureaucratic lunacy.

Sunday, June 19, 2005

Blue Cross surplus grab is a back-door tax Give customers a rebate on their health insurance bills instead

The Detroit News

A proposal by some state lawmakers to confiscate part of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan's \$2.2 billion reserve fund is nothing more than a back-door tax on the insurer's clients.

Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Troy, chair of the Senate's appropriations committee, is considering legislation to force the Blues to cough up part of its surplus to help pay for Medicaid and other state programs for the poor.

There is no justification for the cash grab. Blue Cross is required by state law to maintain a reserve fund to cover unexpected claims. The Blues' national association also demands a surplus, higher than that mandated by the state.

The \$2.2 billion is well above the minimum reserve required, but less than the maximum allowed.

Blue Cross contributes several million dollars a year for health programs serving the poor, and to demand that it do more will drive up costs for Blue Cross clients.

Blue Cross does seem to be holding on to too much money. It should consider rebating more of the surplus to its policy holders. The nonprofit company says it is using about \$100 million this year to offset rate hikes. They could probably afford to give back more to their clients.

But the state has no claim to the money, despite Johnson's assertion that the surplus belongs to all the people of Michigan. It doesn't. It belongs to the Blue Cross clients who paid the money.

If Michigan grabs part of the reserve fund, as Pennsylvania has done, it will be nothing more than a tax hike applied only to Blue Cross customers.

That's wrong. If lawmakers decide Michigan needs to raise taxes to pay for health care for the poor, then all state residents should contribute.

Levying a back-door tax on the customers of one insurance company is unfair.

Area arrests highlight child protection unit –

06/17/2005

Attorney General Mike Cox's Child and Public Protection Unit announced the arrests as part of a sweep of suspected Internet predators.

dan@monroenews.com
By DANIEL J. EIZANS

Michigan Attorney General's Office officials arrested two men with local ties on Internet sex charges earlier this week, including a part-time Luna Pier Police Department officer. Flat Rock Resident James R. Morris, 30, and 42-year-old James G. Aksamit of Allen Park were both arrested in a sweep of suspected Internet predators by Attorney General Mike Cox's Child and Public Protection Unit.

Mr. Aksamit, an Allen Park firefighter and part-time officer for the Luna Pier Police Department, was arrested at his home Thursday and later arraigned in Allen Park's 24th District Court for child sexually abusive activity and using a computer to commit a crime, both 20-year-felonies.

"He was also charged with two counts of disseminating sexually explicit material to minors," said Allison Pierce, a spokeswoman for Mr. Cox's office. "His bond was set at \$50,000."

Mr. Aksamit reportedly used a Webcam and performed a sex act upon himself before investigators, posing as a child. The act resulted in the dissemination of sexually explicit material charges, a four-year felony.

Mr. Morris was arrested on Monday in Novi. He reportedly used a computer to set up a meeting in the Novi area with what he thought was a child and was later taken into custody.

He was arraigned in Novi's 52nd District Court on one count of child sexually abusive activity and one count of using a computer in the commission of a crime, both 20-year felonies.

His bond was set at \$50,000. His next court appearance is a June 22 preliminary hearing.

"As this week's sweep indicates, Internet predators can be any age and come from any walk of society," Mr. Cox said in a statement. "The only things they have in common are that they use the secrecy of the Internet to try and harm our children."

Mr. Morris and Mr. Aksamit became the 35th and 36th to be arrested by the Child and Public Protection Unit to be arrested since Mr. Cox took office.

Citizens are encouraged to report suspected Internet child predators by visiting the www.michigan.gov/ag through the reporting link or by calling the Child and Public Protection Unit directly at (734) 525-4151.

Monday ^{LS5} UPDATE ^{6/20} 1B

Here are some local stories we're revisiting from the past several months.

Cause of boy's death still undetermined

Ingham County medical examiners have not determined a cause of death for a 2-year-old Lansing boy who was found not breathing in

his home last month.

"We're just not there yet," Chief Medical Examiner Dean Sienko said last week. "It's just the nature of this case. ... We want to be careful."

Sienko could not say when the investigation into Jalyn Daniel's death might be complete.

"We want to ensure we have all the facts on the table and we've examined everything we need to examine, and sometimes that can take a while," he said.

Lansing police continue to investigate.

Jalyn, who suffered bruises and cuts to his torso region, was found at his duplex home at 6217 Grovenburg Road. Police are calling his death sus-

picious. They would not release further details.

Jalyn lived in the home with his mother and two siblings. The siblings have since been removed from the home by the Department of Human Services.

Anyone with information may call 483-STOP (483-7867).

GUEST EDITORIAL

Monday, June 20, 2005 11:42 AM EDT

The Daily Telegram

Lenawee Connection

The real face of sexual abuse

The following appeared June 14 in The Poughkeepsie (N.Y.) Journal:

Look around. One in three females you see and one in seven males you encounter in any place, on any given day, has been molested before they reached age 18, according to the Department of Justice. It's obvious child molestation hits far too hard, and far too often, well beyond the courtroom drama played out in Michael Jackson's case.

Jackson has been found not guilty, and the public should most certainly accept the verdict of the jurors - who heard weeks of testimony and then deliberated for days. ... But sexual abuse happens in homes, at friend's houses, at schools, in church. Neighbors, family members and friends are the offenders, and they most likely will never see a day in court, or even have charges pressed against them. Their predatory actions depend - indeed thrive - on silence.

The average pedophile, according to the Amber Center for Missing and Exploited children, molests between 30 and 60 children before being arrested the first time and molests between 360-380 children in his/her lifetime. ... For this reason, it's incumbent upon parents and guardians to take responsibility for their children, to be aggressive and protective of them. And outside adults must take action if something seems amiss in homes.

The American public watched the Jackson trial as a voyeuristic venue. ... But the true faces of childhood sexual abuse are not so far away. Just look around. And pledge to say something the next time something doesn't seem right for a child.

THE NATION

Girl Who Had No Name Finds Road to Healing

The world was looking to save the child seen in porn. But she was safe and rebuilding her life.

By Maggie Farley, Times Staff Writer

Los Angeles Times

June 18, 2005

NEW YORK — Mea, 12, didn't know everyone was looking for her.

She wasn't aware that concerned police officers thought she was caught in a nightmare of abuse, reflected in hundreds of sexually explicit photos of her on the Internet.

And she didn't know that one particular team of Toronto police officers had been so haunted over the years by her image and fate that in February they asked the public to help find her.

But Mea already had been found.

She was safe and with her new adoptive mother. They didn't see the news show where the police broadcast sanitized versions of the Internet photos in February and asked for help identifying the background locations. One of the backgrounds turned out to be a hotel at Disney World, a detail that led many to refer to her as "the Disney World girl."

Mea and her mom also missed a follow-up program that asked viewers if they could identify her friend, described as "a witness to a crime."

An in-depth article about the police search for the mystery girl also appeared in the Los Angeles Times and on its website in late April.

But it wasn't until the FBI called Mea's mother, Faith, last month that they realized Mea had been the subject of an international search.

"If I had seen the pictures, even with her face blanked out, I would have known it was her immediately," said Faith. "But when I heard people talking about it, I just didn't make the connection. Mea had been rescued two years ago."

The man Mea said abused and photographed her for five years, Matthew Alan Mancuso, had been caught in an Internet child pornography sting in 2003 and is serving 15 years in prison. He was her adoptive father.

Mea was placed in the care of Faith, a gutsy 28-year-old who legally adopted her a year ago. They moved far from the quiet hamlet in Pennsylvania where Mancuso stole Mea's childhood.

Mea — whose friends know her by another name — and Faith are fiercely protective of their privacy and asked that where they live be kept secret and that their last name not be used.

But they are willing to talk about what happened because they want Mancuso to stay in prison for the rest of his life.

They hope to see him prosecuted on additional charges for what Mea has described to police as five years of rape and abuse for which he has yet to face justice. And though it is difficult to think of him at all, Mea is willing to testify.

She used to call him "Dad." Now, she calls him "it," or sometimes "jerk."

Mancuso, 46, a thin and balding engineer, had adopted her from a Russian orphanage with partially forged papers when she was 5. She had been placed in the orphanage after her drunken parents had chopped her neck with a large knife. Mancuso told her that he had picked her from a video of many children and that she should feel special. He was saving her, he said.

The abuse began her first night in America, she told police. She described how he made her sleep with him unclothed, shower with him, and more. Soon the camera came out. After photo sessions, he would reward her with toys and gifts if she smiled for the camera, and several times he took her to Disney World.

But if she did not follow his instructions, she said, he would tie her down or lock her up for hours.

As she got older, he fed her plain spaghetti with raw vegetables and did not allow her to drink milk — a starvation diet designed to keep her body thin and childish as she approached puberty. Over the years, he posted hundreds of pictures on the Internet and traded them with other pedophiles.

During Mancuso's online trading sessions two years ago, an undercover officer in Chicago posing as a pedophile gathered enough information about Mancuso's collection to get a federal search warrant. When the FBI came through Mancuso's door, they encountered someone they didn't expect: a terrified 10-year-old girl with light brown hair who weighed 52 pounds.

When the FBI raided his house, they didn't even know she existed," said Faith. "He had brainwashed her so much that she thought that she had done something wrong and they were coming to arrest her."

A foster agency called Faith and asked her to take care of the child. When she picked the girl up, Mea's hair was so brittle that Faith was afraid to brush it, her body so frail that Faith carried her as carefully as glass.

At the same time Mea was being rescued in Pennsylvania, the Toronto Police Service's child exploitation team was in the midst of a mission to find her and other children being exploited by pornographers. The team wanted to develop new tools to keep up with pedophiles who had created a shadowy sphere on the Internet.

For months, the officers in Toronto painstakingly analyzed the details of Mea's pictures, calling

experts to identify the native area of the flowers and the trees — even the signature characteristics of the bricks in a wall. They had narrowed it down to the Northeast in the United States or southeastern Canada. They had circulated photos of her face to American law enforcement agencies, but the connection to Mancuso was missed.

In February, Toronto Det. Sgt. Paul Gillespie decided to release the pictures with the girl digitally erased. On the U.S. side of the border, the FBI joined the search. Tipsters identified the location in some of the photos as a Disney World hotel. Further sleuthing pointed to Pennsylvania.

When the FBI shared its database of child victims with the Pennsylvania police, they discovered a match. The outcome sought for years by the Toronto investigators had already occurred: Mancuso was in prison and the girl had been rescued.

Gillespie likes to think that new technology Mea helped inspire would have led them to her. In April, Microsoft Corp. and the Toronto police unveiled a computer-aided database that would allow police around the world to share information, to track child porn and to let one another know when one of the thousands of child victims had been saved — like Mea.

"Every one of my team just want to give her a big hug," Gillespie said. "To see a child endure what she had to go through and find out that she is now safe made us all cry."

Last year, Mea had her first birthday party. She quickly bloomed after she eased into a healthful diet, discovered a talent for art and hand-painted her bedroom walls. Her favorite color is purple and she regards the care and protection of her pet hamster as a solemn duty.

She lets the hamster crawl over her arms, then cups him gently in her hands, stroking his tawny fur. "He likes this," she says in a clear, high voice. "I think he feels safe."

She has frequent slumber parties with her school friends, their sleeping bags scrunched together on the floor of the modest living room as they paint one another's toenails and chatter halfway until sunrise.

Mea can sleep through most nights now without awaking in terror. The times that she does, Faith gently rocks her, talks to her and softly prays, just as one of Faith's foster mothers did for her.

"I've been through some of the same things she has, and she says that helps her a lot, knowing that I really do understand," Faith said. "And she can see that there is a way forward."

Mea is graceful and deliberate, unrecognizable as the girl in the Internet pictures. Her smile is wide and genuine, and her eyes sparkle. With her friends, she can be a cut-up, a clown, posing happily for photos in silly wigs and costumes.

Orlando police hope to file new charges involving Mancuso's alleged assaults during their Disney World trips that could keep him in prison for life. Last month, an Orlando detective came to interview her. That was the first time she was aware that pictures of her were posted online.

"She asked if [the images] could be taken off the Internet," Faith said. All the detective could answer was "no."

Faith says that Mea was shaken but wants to tell her story to help other children in the same situation, and to make sure that Mancuso is held fully accountable for what he did.

His 15-year sentence derives only from the child pornography charges; he has not been prosecuted for his alleged systematic rape and abuse of his adopted daughter.

In Pennsylvania, the Allegheny County police set aside their charges while the federal authorities tried their case. Faith thought they had been too slow to resume the prosecution — one detective told her there was no hurry since Mancuso had 13 years to go.

"That made me so angry," she said. "I'm in a hurry. Mea is in a hurry. She wants to close the door on this, and she doesn't want to worry about that guy getting out of prison when she is 25. She wants him in there for life."

Faith said that the Allegheny County district attorney told her at one point that they would not prosecute rape charges because they didn't think Mea was ready to testify. When Faith passed that on to Mea, the normally soft-spoken girl demanded to speak to the D.A.

Faith dialed the phone and handed it to her.

"She said, 'I want to know why you dropped the charges. You didn't ask *me*, and I *do* want to testify,' " Faith recalled.

Faith decided to use the publicity about the search for Mea and her rescue to put pressure on the district attorney's office to follow through.

Last month, she contacted an Orlando television station, WESH, and allowed it to do a story, obscuring Mea's face.

Three weeks after the story aired nationally, the district attorney's office announced that Mancuso would be arraigned soon on 11 additional counts, including rape. He had been charged with those crimes in November. Michael Manko, spokesman for the D.A.'s office, said the timing of the arraignment, scheduled for Thursday, was unrelated to the news program.

Pursuing the case is part of a long healing process that, as Faith knows firsthand, never really ends. But Faith hopes to teach Mea that it was not her fault. She wrote a poem for her daughter saying she could leave her past behind like an old cocoon and emerge into the world brand new, a butterfly.

Mea has restarted counseling after a brief break. She is planning a summer trip to Orlando, to "conquer it." But she recently decided not to go back to Disney World just yet, and to go to Sea World instead.

It is a big step on a lengthy journey, but Mea has taken the hardest one and allowed herself to trust again.

In a Mother's Day letter to Faith that she illustrated with flowers and rolled up like a scroll, Mea wrote:

"Dear Mumzie, I really love you so much. With you, I feel safe. Thank you for being there for me and for being my mom."

Couple prepare to hurdle adoption barrier

Sunday, June 19, 2005

By Ted Roelofs The Grand Rapids Press

There was something about her picture.

Gerrie Morgan looked at the photo of the Vietnamese infant and knew -- just knew -- this was the girl she and her husband, Mark, would adopt.

"When you see your child, you know it. She was the girl," recalled Gerrie Morgan, 42, of Plainfield Township.

That was in February 2003, as the Morgans began adoption proceedings they thought would take a few months. More than two years later, they pray the arrival of Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai in the United States next week will help end their wait.

"We are hoping this is it," she said. "We have been through one delay or another so many times before."

As part of meetings with President Bush and other officials, the prime minister is expected to sign an agreement that frees Vietnamese children for adoption by Americans.

They have been in limbo since 2003, when Vietnam passed a law that requires bilateral agreements with outside countries before adoptions are approved.

An administrator with the Oregon agency that processed the adoption said no one anticipated negotiations would drag so long.

"We kept being reassured this was not going to be a problem," said Susan Cox, a vice president for Holt International Children's Services."

Cox said the Vietnam government halted international adoptions following reports of corruption and claims of baby-trafficking. Adoptions to the United States plummeted from more than 700 a year to virtually none in 2003.

At Jenison-based Adoption Associates Inc., consultant Carol Jonkman said complications are not uncommon in the international arena.

"Definitely, politics plays a big part," Jonkman said. "If there's anything going on between the two countries it slows it down."

Jonkman called adoption a "low rung on the totem pole" compared to other disputes that arise between nations.

Although the Morgans have four biological children and a 5-year-

old adopted from China, Gerrie Morgan said it was only natural she and her husband would adopt another.

"I come from a family of 14. It's always been my desire to have a large family," she said.

Because his travel as a designer for Rockford-based Wolverine World Wide frequently takes him overseas, Mark Morgan has been able to visit their prospective daughter three times. Gerrie visited in March, greeted by a little girl growing up fast.

She was abandoned as an infant at a hospital near Ho Chi Minh City, taken into an orphanage, then transferred to a foster family.

"She is just a delightful little girl who loves new toys and new clothes and all the things a little girl would like," said Gerrie Morgan, who is awaiting the return of her husband from a trip to China.

"Our best hope is she will be home by the end of the year," Morgan said.

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Adopted kids teach parents a thing or two

Sunday, June 19, 2005

By Kathy Bush The Grand Rapids Press

Maia Machiela looked like she wanted to fly.

The 5-year-old, sporting pink wings on her yellow dance costume, happily flapped her arms as she performed a Chinese village dance depicting butterflies.

After she came off the stage Saturday, Maia quickly put on an orange-and-black striped mask to become a tiger and performed a Chinese dance called "Two Tigers."

When asked which she liked better -- the tiger or the butterfly -- Maia's response was quick. "Both."

Maia and her family, who live in Ada, were among more than 1,000 people who attended Bethany Christian Services' Multicultural Festival for families who have adopted through Bethany.

This is the 23rd year for the festival that features dance, games, food and stories from around the world. The event at Bethany, 901 Eastern Ave. NE, allows families of international adoption to experience the culture of their child's home country, as well as others'.

Maia's parents adopted her in China four years ago.

"This is so nice to celebrate their heritage," said Maia's mother, Dawn Machiela, as she helped Maia with her tiger mask. "They can be proud to be Chinese."

Lily An, Maia's teacher, runs a cultural program in Grand Rapids in which children adopted from China learn everything from dance to Chinese language, even meditation. About 300 children have come through her program since she established it five years ago, An said.

Robin Andrasi, of Traverse City, brought her adopted Chinese daughter Mei Lee, 2, to the festival. She told An she wished there was a similar program in her area.

Andrasi said the festival is an opportunity to see families she met in China while adopting Mei Lee last year.

"There's four families here we met in China," Andrasi said. "This is like a little reunion."

Four-year-old Parker Depuis, one of five children his parents adopted from Korea in the past five years, was more interested in animals at the petting zoo than learning about his Korean heritage.

"Come look at the duck," Parker said excitedly. "Whoa, look at that big rabbit."

Parker's family came from Brighton for the festival.

"We come here every year, said Kim Depuis, Parker's mother, who is from Grand Rapids and uses the occasion to visit family. "We try to take our kids where there are adopted kids.

"We adopted our first child for infertility reasons," Depuis added. "It was such a blessing ..., we decided it was our ministry."

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The Muskegon Chronicle

|

Carter hammering for Habitat in Michigan

Monday, June 20, 2005

FROM LOCAL AND WIRE REPORTS

BENTON HARBOR -- Tommy Ray sat on his stoop, sipping a soda, and cautiously watched construction crews Sunday haul stacks of wooden planks and building supplies down the street.

For years, his neighbors have fled Buss Avenue, leaving this economically depressed southwestern Michigan town to find work and opportunity elsewhere. Again and again, residents here picked up scrap wood to board up the empty buildings' windows and doors, less than two miles from where racial strife in 2003 drew a national spotlight to the town's plight.

Now, former President Jimmy Carter, his wife, Rosalynn, and an estimated 1,500 Habitat for Humanity International volunteers have gathered to help Benton Harbor: In the next week, they plan to build 20 homes.

It's part of the organization's statewide effort, which begins today and aims to finish about 230 houses throughout Michigan by Friday. Five of those will be in Muskegon, two in Spring Lake and one in Newaygo County.

"We've come here to work. Let's get to work!" Carter, 80, told hundreds of cheering volunteers Sunday at an opening ceremony at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

The houses are just one of the many steps, some more modest, being taken to improve this town of nearly 11,200 people. But even as Benton Harbor is slowly coming back to life, residents such as Ray fear that such improvements may be arriving too late.

In recent months, police in riot gear have repeatedly been called to break up fights and control unruly crowds of young people.

The city government has wrestled with a scandal-tinged recall election to unseat a city commissioner. A judge ruled the recall election results invalid because of voter

manipulation. And a popular local minister was arrested and charged with allegedly manipulating absentee ballots and paying residents each \$5 to vote.

"I think the new houses are a great opportunity, and it makes the neighborhood look good," said Ray, 50, a city maintenance foreman. "But there's still so much happening that's wrong, and people are mad. I'm afraid things are going to be worse than they were in 2003."

Benton Harbor isn't the only community being changed by the Jimmy Carter work project. The shadow of the project stretches in multiple directions across the state, including nearly 100 miles up the Lake Michigan shoreline and across Muskegon.

Five Muskegon homes will be dedicated and blessed in on-site services Friday. All five -- including three in the city's Marquette neighborhood -- are being constructed as part of the Carter work project.

"We're calling it the Habitat Olympics," said Diana Miller, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Muskegon.

Originally, the plan was to build all the homes in Detroit, Miller said. But Habitat officials on the western side of the state spoke up.

According to Habitat for Humanity officials, Michigan ranks 48th out of 50 states in state funding for affordable housing. Close to 375,000 families in Michigan spend more than half of their income for housing.

"We said, 'Hello? We're here,'" Miller said. A coalition of Benton Harbor business people made a visit to Habitat headquarters in Americus, Ga. As a result, Miller said, "the decision was made to open it up all over the state."

In Muskegon, homes are being raised at 269 Meeking, 1077 Pine, 1434 Ducey and next door to each other at 1078 and 1088 Marquette. Groups from churches, youth organizations, businesses have joined individual volunteers to do work on the homes.

Four of the homes have sponsors. Two of those are "interfaith builds," involving volunteer help and sponsorship from Christian and Jewish places of worship.

One of the homes is still unsponsored, but "we stepped out on faith to do it anyway," Miller said. "This is what God called us to do."

"We still need lots of help. We still need lots of support."

The services of dedication and blessing Friday will be held on the home sites, beginning concurrently at 2 p.m. The homes will be open for viewing from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. From 4 to 5 p.m., there will be a reception at Baker College, featuring talks from Muskegon

Mayor Steve Warmington, state Rep. Doug Bennett, state Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom and others.

On the same day, two Habitat homes in Spring Lake will be dedicated at 4 p.m. They are located at 621 and 623 River.

In preparation for that event, U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra will be joining volunteers for Tri-Cities Area Habitat for Humanity today at 621 and 623 River, Spring Lake. In addition to his volunteer work, Hoekstra will present a donation for the construction of Habitat for Humanity homes in northwest Ottawa County.

However, it is Benton Harbor where the need for transformation remains most pressing. Two years ago, residents angry because a black motorcyclist was killed in a police chase spent two nights roaming the streets, throwing bricks and setting fire to more than two dozen buildings.

Simmering racial tension and mistrust of local authorities have plagued this town since long before the 2003 uprising. Nestled on the shore of Lake Michigan, the economic and racial divisions have for years been stark between Benton Harbor and its "twin-city" neighbor of St. Joseph.

More than 90 percent of St. Joseph's 8,700 residents are white. Unemployment is less than 4 percent.

About 90 percent of the population in Benton Harbor is black and half the town's residents don't have a high school diploma. Unemployment usually hovers about 30 percent, according to local and state economists.

But the employment picture is slowly improving, the economists said. A survey by Manpower Inc. earlier this year found that 37 percent of the companies in Benton Harbor and nearby St. Joseph planned to hire more staff this year.

The state launched a program to train local residents for high-tech and other skilled work and to help draw private investments to boost local business.

Along downtown's wide streets, volunteers have been collecting trash that litters dozens of empty lots. Artists, funded by the Michigan-based Kellogg Foundation, have begun work on four murals to be painted on different brick building exteriors.

Atlantic Automotive Components, which makes interior car parts, plans to expand its facilities and hire several dozen new workers. Ace Companies LLC, a scrap metal broker, is reopening a manufacturing facility and converting it back into an aluminum-smelting plant.

A home decor shop based in St. Joseph has transformed one of its brick warehouses in Benton Harbor into a high-end showroom. A Chicago landscape architect has bought a

brick commercial building with plans to expand. Three new restaurants -- a Mexican cafe, a wine-tasting bistro and a microbrewery -- are set to open in the next few months.

Leslie Pickell, a management consultant from Chicago, has pooled her money with several partners to buy a 100-year-old livery stable. They began planning how to transform the building into a microbrewery three days before 27-year-old Terrance Shurn died in the June 2003 police chase.

"When the (riots) happened, it was real dramatic," said Pickell, co-owner of The Livery Prew Pub. "But I fell in love with the area. There was no way I was going to leave. Ever since then, it seems like things are slowly turning around."

Hoping to speed up that slow improvement is what drew the Carters to the Benton Harbor area, said Paul Leonard, chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity International. The Carters plan to split their time between Benton Harbor and Detroit this week.

"It's given us hope to see someone important care about us," said Monica Nichols, 24, who moved to Benton Harbor with her family eight years ago. "Most people, though, are too afraid to believe too much. We're waiting to see what else comes."

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Jun 20, 12:25 PM EDT

Jimmy Carter work project under way in Michigan

By JAMES PRICHARD
Associated Press Writer

BENTON HARBOR, Mich. (AP) -- The Jimmy Carter Work Project got under way in Michigan on Monday, led by the sweat equity of the former president himself and several members of his family.

Benton Harbor and Detroit are host sites for this year's annual home-building project run by Habitat for Humanity International.

Thirty-one houses are to be built this week in the Motor City and 24 are to go up in Benton Harbor, an impoverished Lake Michigan city of 11,000 people in the southwestern part of the state.

In total, 63 Habitat affiliates in Michigan and Windsor, Ontario, are to build more than 200 houses. Volunteers started working at around 7:30 a.m. EDT Monday.

Carter, 80, said he came to Benton Harbor a couple of years ago shortly after two nights of rioting rocked portions of the city.

After touring the city again, he said the conditions are improving.

"I rode around here yesterday when I got here," Carter said during a news conference.

"You couldn't find a piece of trash."

He planned to work in Benton Harbor on Monday and Tuesday, then head to Detroit and Windsor on Wednesday and Thursday before returning to Benton Harbor by the end of the week.

*Edward Woods III, opinion maker
The Herald-Palladium
June 20, 2005*

Let's build on Work Project momentum

A Chinese Proverb states, "Learning is weightless, a treasure you can always carry easily." Next week, the Jimmy Carter Work Project (JCWP) comes to town and our community will once again be on an international and national media stage. What have we learned since the last time our community was on the international and national media stage? What messages, sound bites and attitudes will we communicate about our community to the world? Will it be optimistic, realistic or pessimistic? Will it be truthful or what we want people to hear? Despite our geographic boundaries, we are still viewed as one community.

The JCWP is the internationally recognized event of Habitat for Humanity International, which Harbor Habitat for Humanity is an affiliate. Habitat was started in 1984 in New York City, when former President Jimmy Carter assisted in renovating a six-story building for 19 families to have safe and affordable housing. In addition to raising the need for safe and affordable housing, President Carter also promotes the JCWP as a way to alleviate the "curse of homelessness," both nationally and internationally. The JCWP is a huge deal, and we should be proud that our community was selected.

Despite the civil disturbances from two years ago, we have a wonderful opportunity to showcase what we have learned over the past two years. We have learned that what happens in Benton Harbor truly effects the perception of surrounding municipalities adjacent to Benton Harbor. We have learned that the familiar phrase is true, "many hands help make work light." We have learned that collaborations and partnerships are essential to obtaining resources and ensuring efficiency. We have learned that there are a lot of good people out there, and that sometimes the ones making the news are not representative of the community as a whole. As a result, we should get to know individuals and not label groups of people.

Furthermore, we need to be more vigilant in positively and actively resolving the challenges that are in our community. If we do not, it will affect our community as whole. We cannot expect businesses to expand, or locate in our area, if negativity dominates the airwaves as it relates to our community. Ladies and gentlemen, the finger-pointing game has only shown our ability to make excuses, and not secure results. We need to address our challenges and show the meaningful action that is taking place to meet these challenges.

The JCWP provides another opportunity to learn that there are more similarities than differences when it comes to individuals. First, the JCWP reminds us that individuals want safe and affordable housing. Second, some individuals, who may need assistance, do not want something for nothing. They are willing to work for it and do their fair share. Third, individuals do not mind giving their time when action is taking place to get things done is more of a priority than meeting just to meet.

Bob Story, president of the Harbor Habitat for Humanity, states in Habitat's summer newsletter: "Habitat for Humanity, at its core, is truly the work that comes from the hearts and minds of committed volunteers that are putting their faith into action."

"Faith into action" is the phrase that grabbed my attention the most in Story's statement. What is "faith in action"? Is it boasting and proclaiming how you are helping those people in Benton Harbor? Is it boasting and proclaiming about your charitable contributions? Is it looking for recognition and publicity for doing a good deed? Is it showing up for a cameo appearance when the press is there to document your involvement? "Faith in action" is simply, voluntarily and sincerely living the tenets of one's faith in thought and in action, both privately as well as publicly.

The JCWP and Habitat for Humanity have coined the phrase, "It is more than just building houses - it's building productive lives and vibrant communities." Next week, we will be able to witness this for ourselves. Maybe we can carry this momentum into other community initiatives as well to make Michigan's Great Southwest more than just a feel-good marketing slogan, rather, a learning model for how a community respects, resolves and responds to its challenges and opportunities.

Edward Woods III can be reached at edwardwoodsIII@hotmail.com.

PEOPLE NEED YOU

Sunday, June 19, 2005

For these and other volunteering opportunities, call the Volunteer Center of Greater Kalamazoo at 382-8350, stop by the office at 709-A S. Westnedge Ave., or visit www.volunteerkalamazoo.org.

The Air Zoo is looking for Maxflight Operators any day from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Community Advocates For Persons With Developmental Disabilities needs many volunteers during Ribfest Aug. 4-6. Choose to be a special event host or gate attendant; assist with beverage ticket sales, children's activities, balloon distribution; or provide volunteer support by serving as a back-up to other volunteers, selling T-shirts and helping with the volunteer check-in process. Kalamazoo Deacons Conference needs warehouse, grounds and general maintenance, clothing department and receptionist assistance volunteers.

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan (LSSM) always has a need for caring people to provide foster care in their homes. Also needed are mentors to spend four hours each month with young people in the independent living program.

American Red Cross needs many volunteers on Wednesday for a Kalamazoo Disaster Exercise at the Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport. This a daylong event. Volunteers who are available for a shorter time are welcome; however, everyone must attend an orientation at 8 a.m.

Goodwill Industries needs event staff volunteers for 2005 Tug of War fund-raiser event at the Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport on July 16. Volunteers are needed in two-hour shifts to assist with team check-in, set-up, cleanup and paperwork.

Kalamazoo Gospel Mission needs volunteers every day of the week for many duties including maintenance (plumbing, carpentry, electrical, painting, and general cleaning), clothes sorting and hanging, meal preparation and serving, kitchen warehouse help and clerical assistance. Also needed are activity helpers for children's summer program activities.

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Mentors share pampering with youths

Sunday, June 19, 2005

By Amanda Greenman The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Her long blonde hair in an elegant and curly up-do, Ashley Nash was enjoying a yogurt parfait with her mentor, Laura Koop, as she tried to decide what to do next: have her nails professionally polished or her makeup applied.

"Getting my hair done was my favorite," Nash said.

Nash and Koop were enjoying Ladies Night Out recently, an activity for women sponsored by agencies in the Ottawa County Mentoring Collaborative.

A masseuse, hair stylists, nail and makeup artists, and a yoga instructor were on hand throughout the night to ensure the girls and their mentors had plenty of opportunities to spend time together and enjoy themselves.

Koop said the activities were a unique opportunity for the preteen and teenage girls and their mentors. "It's a good opportunity for girls to experiment with makeup and hair," Koop said.

Becky Friebe and Theresa Schmidt got facials from self-employed spa owner Lakeyta Akridge.

"It's not something we do very often; it's a special treat tonight," said Friebe, who has been mentoring Schmidt for about two months.

The Mentoring Collaborative recruits mentors for fourteen agencies in the county, matching mentors with youths based on their personalities and interests. Collaborative Co-Chairwoman Lisa Bottomley said four free activities a month are planned for the pairs.

"The activities show that mentoring is about the time mentors spend. There is no need for mentors to spend a lot of money," said Bottomley, who added more mentors are needed throughout Ottawa County.

"We have over 200 youth in Ottawa County in need of a mentor, in addition to more on a waiting list," Bottomley said.

Agencies in the Collaborative take turns planning events. Ladies Night Out, one of the year's biggest events, was planned by Mentor Michigan Vista, the Wraparound Children's Advocacy Center and Michigan State University Extensions Journey program.

Girls received hygiene packets and prize bags containing useful items such as hair clips, brushes, scented soaps and shampoo.

"It's a focus on health," Bottomley said.

There were healthy refreshments such as yogurt, fruit and popcorn available for the girls.

"We're trying to teach healthy eating habits," Rachel Patmos said. "We're making yogurt parfaits and hoping to introduce girls to new healthy foods."

Bottomley stressed the importance of volunteers in making the Ladies Night Out program happen. Local salons and those who are self-employed volunteered their services for the program.

"It's a great way for them to give back to the community," Bottomley said.

Sharon Higgs, who works at Children's Advocacy Center, was beautifying girls' nails with bright pink polish at the nail table. The night was an opportunity for her to help out while doing something she enjoys.

"I used to own a salon, so I'm going back to doing nails tonight," Higgs said.

Jenny Hoort, who works at Eighth Street Saloon, volunteered to style hair after hearing about the event through a friend.

"It's a way to help out. It's the stuff (the girls) don't normally get to do," Hoort said.

To volunteer as a mentor, contact Harold at (616) 846-8250 or Abby at (616) 748-8435.

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State system delivering delays in child support

Web-posted Mar 19, 2005

By CHARLES CRUMM

Of The Daily Oakland Press

Oakland County Friend of the Court warned parents to expect delays of a couple of weeks in receiving child support and other possible glitches when it switched to a central state system more than a year ago.

The delays and glitches were supposed to be temporary, but parents in the system say they've been anything but.

Susan Newill of Waterford Township has a cordial relationship with her ex-husband, a salaried Ford employee, and an income withholding order.

But when the county child support cases were shifted to the state, she went 10 weeks without receiving support money.

It hasn't been much better since, she said. Her most recent check of Feb. 28 didn't hit her bank account until March 10.

"In two years, there's never the same amount deposited twice," she says. "There's really no logical explanation for this."

But there are explanations, both from the county and the state. County officials say they resisted joining the state system as long as possible, contending their own system was superior.

They joined a federally required system when the state was threatened with the loss of \$147 million in federal grants.

Under the changes, they now forward the cash to Lansing, leaving the state agency to disburse it to parents.

Passed in 1996, the federal law mandates states to centralize child-support collections and establish a central registry to help track delinquent parents across state lines.

Locally, the Friend of the Court says the most common complaint is that the state system is more difficult for child support workers to navigate.

Oakland County sends \$200 million a year to Lansing for child support for 53,000 active cases.

Even so, circuit court judges say few complaints have come directly to them about the system.

At the state level, the Office of Child Support in Lansing processes \$1.4 billion a year in child support for one million active cases. It says the money is processed in a timely manner in 90 percent of the cases.

Mark Jasonowicz, deputy director of the Office of Child Support, said the times and amounts custodial parents receive can vary for a number of reasons.

For parents who have income withholding orders, businesses forward the money to Lansing. Some employers pay employees twice a month, every week or every two weeks.

"Part of the issue is when they get paid and how that falls and when the money is remitted to us," Jasonowicz said.

Differing amounts that parents receive can be due more to calendar differences and processing dates, he said. Sometimes there are three paydays a month and sometimes two, depending on the month and the employers.

"The court support order might have been on a weekly or biweekly basis. Everything we do is on a monthly basis by federal law," Jasonowicz said. "Depending on what dates we get the money, there would be a different amount (sent back to parents)."

Even with no glitches, processing still takes a few days.

Once the state receives the money and information, state computers match the amounts with records. The next day checks are issued that go into the mail the day after that, he said.

For electronic fund transfers, if the money is received on Friday, it likely won't be posted to a parent's account until at least Monday.

There is no 24-hour turnaround.

"That just doesn't happen," Jasonowicz said.

Study: Unwed birth rate dips as child support laws toughen

*"Women living in states that do a better job
of enforcing child support are less likely
to become an unwed mother."*

Robert Plotnick

University of Washington professor of public affairs and lead study author

On the Web

► National Center
for Children in Poverty:
www.nccp.org

States with rigid rules have impact on single parents

53
W/19
By **REBECCA COOK**
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Tough child support laws may dissuade men from becoming unwed fathers, as states with the most stringent laws and strict enforcement have up to 20 percent fewer out-of-wedlock births, a new study shows.

Researchers at the University of Washington and Columbia University said Friday that child

support laws' power to reduce single parenthood is an unintended consequence of a policy designed to help children and cut public welfare costs.

"Often the unintended effects are bad, so it's refreshing to see that," said lead study author Robert Plotnick, a University of Washington professor of public affairs. "Women living in states that do a better job of enforcing child support are less likely to become an unwed mother."

The percentage of unmarried births in the United States has increased from 10 percent in the 1960s to about a third of all births today. Because children of single parents run a higher risk of pov-

erty, academic failure and other problems, lawmakers are always seeking policies that will discourage unwed births — usually focusing on the mothers.

Researchers said their study recognizes the father's responsibility.

"Decisions about sexual intercourse and marriage involve two people," said study co-author Irwin

Garfinkel, a Columbia University professor and one of the nation's top experts on child support.

The study, which has not yet been published, looked at a nationwide sample of 5,195 women of childbearing age using data from 1980-1993.

It didn't show whether tougher child support laws prevented

pregnancies or encouraged marriage. Plotnick said the data limited the researchers to observing a strong correlation between tough child support enforcement and fewer out-of-wedlock births. Whether that's caused by fewer unmarried people getting pregnant or more couples marrying when the woman is expecting, he could not say. But he said the findings warrant further study.

"It's been very hard to find conventional programs that reduce unwed childbearing that work," Plotnick said Friday. "If you found a program cutting nonmarried births by 20 percent, you'd be happy."

Researchers noted wide disparities in child support policies. For example, in 2002 — the most recent year for which data were available — only one state, New Jersey, collected at least 80 percent of owed child support.

According to Columbia University's National Center for Children in Poverty, 31 states collected 41 percent to 60 percent of child support orders. The District of Columbia collected less than 20 percent of all child support owed.

Michigan Report
June 17, 2005

MISS. TIES STATE FOR NATION'S WORST UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Michigan no longer has sole possession of the nation's worst monthly unemployment rate with Mississippi in May falling into a tie for the dubious distinction.

In April, Michigan had the highest and Mississippi the second-highest unemployment rate. But Mississippi's rate rose more than Michigan's in May, creating the tie at 7.1 percent each. Oregon was third at 6.5 percent, Alaska fourth at 6.4 percent and South Carolina fifth at 6.3 percent.

Illinois posted a 5.8 percent rate, Indiana, 4.8 percent, Ohio 6.1 percent and Wisconsin 4.7 percent.

Why 'dead-end jobs' don't hurt us

*Monday, June 20, 2005 11:42 AM EDT
The Daily Telegram
Lenawee On-Line*

Guest commentary by Thomas Sowell

Sometimes it seems as if liberals have a genius for producing an unending stream of ideas that are counterproductive for the poor, whom they claim to be helping. Few of these notions are more counterproductive than the idea of "menial work" or "dead-end jobs."

Think about it: Why do employers pay people to do "menial" work? Because the work has to be done. What useful purpose is served by stigmatizing work that someone is going to have to do anyway?

Is emptying bed pans in a hospital menial work? What would happen if bed pans didn't get emptied? Let people stop emptying bed pans for a month and there would be bigger problems than if sociologists stopped working for a year.

Having someone who can come into a home to clean and cook and do minor chores around the house can be a godsend to someone who is an invalid or who is suffering the infirmities of age - and who does not want to be put into an institution. Someone who can be trusted to take care of small children is likewise a treasure.

Many people who do these kinds of jobs do not have the education, skills or experience to do more complex kinds of work. Yet they can make a real contribution to society while earning money that keeps them off welfare.

Many low-level jobs are called "dead-end jobs" by liberal intellectuals because these jobs have no promotions ladder. But it is superficial beyond words to say that this means that people in such jobs have no prospect of rising economically.

Many people at all levels of society, including the richest, have at some point or other worked at jobs that had no promotions ladder, so-called "dead-end jobs." The founder of the NBC network began work as a teenager hawking newspapers on the streets. Billionaire Ross Perot began with a paper route.

You don't get promoted from such jobs. You use the experience, initiative, and discipline that you develop in such work to move on to something else that may be wholly different. People who start out flipping hamburgers at McDonald's seldom stay there for a full year, much less for life.

Dead-end jobs are the kinds of jobs I have had all my life. But, even though I started out delivering groceries in Harlem, I don't deliver groceries there anymore. I moved on to other jobs - most of which have not had any promotions ladders.

My only official promotion in more than half a century of working was from associate professor to full professor at UCLA. But that was really just a pay increase, rather than a real promotion, because associate professors and full professors do the same work.

Notions of menial jobs and dead-end jobs may be just shallow misconceptions among the

intelligentsia but they are a deadly counterproductive message to the poor. Refusing to get on the bottom rung of the ladder usually means losing your chance to move up the ladder.

Welfare can give you money but it cannot give you job experience that will move you ahead economically. Selling drugs on the streets can get you more money than welfare but it cannot give you experience that you can put on a job application. And if you decide to sell drugs all your life, that life can be very short.

Back around the time of the First World War, a young black man named Paul Williams studied architecture and then accepted a job as an office boy at an architectural firm. He agreed to work for no pay, though after he showed up the company decided to pay him something, after all.

What they paid him would probably be dismissed today as "chump change." But what Paul Williams wanted from that company was knowledge and experience, more so than money.

He went on to create his own architectural company, designing everything from churches and banks to mansions for movie stars - and contributing to the design of the theme building at Los Angeles International Airport.

The real chumps are those who refuse to start at the bottom for "chump change." Liberals who encourage such attitudes may think of themselves as friends of the poor but they do more harm than enemies.

Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. His Web site is www.tsowell.com.

Jun 20, 12:02 AM EDT

Senate to consider more background checks in nursing homes

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Bolstered by a report showing that one in 10 employees with criminal pasts work in nursing homes, state lawmakers want to stiffen background check requirements and exclude more convicts from being hired.

A state Senate panel could vote this week on legislation that would revise a 2002 law so more employees with felony or misdemeanor convictions are kept out of nursing homes and away from seniors and vulnerable adults.

Attorney General Mike Cox and some Republican senators say the bills are needed to protect against fraud, theft and other potential crimes inside the state's residential care facilities.

"I want nursing home residents to feel safe," said Sen. Tony Stamas, R-Midland.

A key measure in the legislation would eliminate a grandfather clause that currently does not require background checks on workers hired before May 2002. The three-bill package also would require homes to do annual checks rather than just at hiring, and to conduct such checks on all employees - not just those who directly care for residents, as is currently mandated.

Cox's office recently released a study showing that 9 percent of the state's certified nurse's aides - who often work in nursing homes - had outstanding criminal warrants, and 3 percent had past convictions. A separate attorney general's office report showed that in four nursing homes, 9 percent of all employees had outstanding warrants and 11 percent had been convicted of a crime.

Officials from the nursing home industry say they will work with lawmakers on proposed changes, but they have some problems with the legislation and the attorney general's studies.

Kristen Parker of the Health Care Association of Michigan, which represents more than 200 nursing homes statewide, said it is unclear how many of the warrants are for unpaid parking tickets and how many are for more serious offenses.

Doing more background checks could cost between \$50 and \$60 per check - a financial burden for nursing homes, she added.

"If you're going to require all employees to have background checks, who's going to be the gatekeeper?" she said. "Who will inform facilities when someone is arrested or convicted?"

David Herbel of the Michigan Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, which represents nonprofit nursing homes, said there often are long delays between when a nursing home submits an applicant's name to a law enforcement agency and it learns if he or she

has a criminal past.

Tacking on more background checks without financial backing could make things worse, he said.

Herbel noted the attorney general's studies are not comparative to society as a whole or other industries. He also said the elderly care industry is working with the state Department of Community Health to expand the number of providers required to do background checks on employees so the law extends to home health care agencies such as Hospice.

Cox spokeswoman Allison Pierce said holes in the current law must be filled. She said the system currently is effective 90 percent of the time.

"Let's get it 100 percent right," she said.

The nursing home bills are expected to be considered Wednesday by the Senate Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs Committee.

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Keeping teens in school with force won't work

Lawful dropout age not the real problem

Friday, June 17, 2005

Too many children in Michigan aren't graduating from high school - perhaps 25 percent, according to several studies. Once they turn 16, scores of them simply abandon the classroom. Legislation proposed by Sen. Liz Brater, D-Ann Arbor, would boost the state's compulsory school attendance law two years to age 18. Keeping it where it is, Brater says, sends the message "that it's OK to leave school when (kids) are 16, when we know it's not OK."

Indeed, thousands of Michigan kids giving up on education every year is not OK. It hurts not just their future prospects but the state's, which is struggling to produce an educated, highly skilled work force.

But hiking the age to 18 in Michigan before other more fundamental improvements are made elsewhere to the education system could do more harm than good.

Enforcing the higher attendance age would require significantly more state funding. But tracking and penalizing truants already is spotty, and with Lansing and local districts strapped for cash, greater enforcement is unlikely to happen. School's haven't received an increase in the per-pupil minimum of \$6,700 for three years, and they suffered mid-year cuts in 2003 and 2004.

If officials nevertheless were somehow able to fund the new mandate amid the state's fiscal crisis, we'd wonder about their priorities. An increasing majority of teachers statewide are having to pay for classroom supplies, according to a report in Monday's News. Class size continues to be too high. Pouring money into chasing truants is needed less than filling some teaching vacancies and funding programs designed to interest students and keep them in schools in the first place. It's also needed for more alternative education programs, which lost funding two years ago.

Offering driver's education classes only to students meeting school attendance requirements, as some in the Capitol advocate, could keep more kids in school longer.

But keeping them there without also providing them with a curriculum better suited to holding their interest and increasing their skills will only place added pressure on educators, especially those having to tend them not in alternative education settings but in classrooms with students intending to continue their schooling beyond high school.

Brater's bill, which is said to be drawing serious bipartisan attention, is well-intentioned. Who doesn't want kids in schools longer, with the hope that having them there will allow more of them to handle increasingly skilled 21st century jobs, and others to simply better deal with pressures and opportunities as adults?

But Brater's bill places the cart before the horse. Schools need more resources suited to both college-bound and struggling or street-bound students before simply trying to fill their classrooms with more of the latter for as long as possible.

Editorials & Letters

Also on our mind ...

FLINT JOURNAL EDITORIAL

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, June 19, 2005

TRUANCY POLICY HAS PENALTIES, PLUSES:

Prosecutor David Leyton's stepped-up enforcement of truancy laws obviously helps him politically, but why shouldn't good leadership and wise policy be rewarded? Threatening to arrest parents who won't get their children to school has put a bright light on a serious educational problem. Our only fear is that Leyton and the schools might slack off on attendance enforcement once the media attention dies down. So far, we're encouraged that this won't happen, based on how quickly and cooperatively Genesee County's 21 districts have embraced the program. They're all giving Leyton the names of parents who've done the poorest jobs of getting their young children to school for possible prosecution. The most recent scofflaw targeted is a Davison man, whose 9-year-old daughter missed 63 classroom days in the school year just ended. Such interrupted learning hardly qualifies as an education, and it's only just that a parent pay a price for this degree of irresponsibility. On the other end, it's only fair for Leyton to earn credit, too.

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Little hope for Little Paws day care

Sunday, June 19, 2005

By Kym Reinstadler The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- For 10 years an onsite day care at West Ottawa High School helped teen parents stay in school by making high-quality child care accessible, reliable and free.

Little Paws Day Care will not move to West Ottawa's new high school campus -- although two full-time caregivers who supervise students in the nursery say they are awaiting official word.

"It's been difficult, financially, to maintain Little Paws for the last couple of years," Principal Jim Nicolette said. "When you compare the cost of the program with the number of students served, it's very costly -- too expensive at a time we're having to make budget cuts every year."

Little Paws cost the district \$30,000 per year, the wages of the two caregivers.

During the 2004-05 school year, Little Paws served nine students with nine babies and toddlers. Six students anticipated being able to use the program next fall. They now are scrambling to find other affordable child-care options so they can graduate from high school.

Some students fault Nicolette for not announcing the program's fate until a junior class meeting during the last week of school. By then, all but a few programs at Careerline Tech Center, which offers free child care for juniors and seniors in vocational training, were full.

Nicolette said state school funding has been fickle in recent years, and he didn't want to nix the program until he could be sure there would be insufficient revenue. The budget details do not become clear until summer, he said.

The state does not track how many high schools offer day care, but Nicolette says it is rare.

While the economy remains sluggish, Michigan high schools are hard pressed to continue doing so much for such a small group of students, he said.

West Ottawa was struggling this spring to identify \$1.3 million of \$2 million in cuts for next year. Budget adjustments are needed to make up for rising health-care and retirement costs while funding remains flat.

It is a tall task considering West Ottawa also is opening a new high school, retooling a middle school as another high school, and revamping two buildings as sixth- to eight-grade middle schools.

"It would be sad to see Little Paws end because there's so much success," said Colleen Arendsen, who has worked in the nursery since 1997 and "would work there forever, if I could."

She said the teen mothers form an "amazing" network, encouraging each other in school, helping each other rise to parenting challenges and loaning each other outgrown baby clothes.

Many former students return with their children to visit, Arendsen said. A few have graduated from college. Others are pursuing college degrees. Some are happily married and raising families.

Little Paws has played a role in these success stories, Arendsen said.

Nicolette said Little Paws' success as a dropout prevention program has been somewhat overstated by some measurements that count the same student more than once if he or she is involved in the program multiple years.

He says 76 teen parents have been in the program, and 39 of those have graduated from West Ottawa. Four more graduated last week. West Ottawa does not track students who earn diplomas from other schools.

Sara Scheuermann, who directs West Ottawa's child-care and child-nutrition programs, said providing infant care is costly because state day-care licensing regulations stipulate each adult provider have no more than four babies to care for.

Teen parents, who worked one of five school periods each day in the nursery, and students in a child-development class who used Little Paws for hands-on experience, could not be counted in the ratio, Scheuermann said.

In actuality, each baby and toddler had a "grown-up" assigned just to him or her every period of the day, Arendsen said.

Scheuermann said Arendsen and Kim DeVries, the other Little Paws employee, will be offered positions in West Ottawa's other child-care programs.

Students will children older than 2 1/2 years could use Kinder Cubs, a day care with preschool program that operates from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Lakeshore and Lakewood Elementary Schools.

Kinder Cubs is a fee-based program, but teen parents might qualify for state assistance with child care, Scheuermann said.

Arendsen said most students have children younger than 2 1/2 years at Little Paws and many do not have their own transportation, which makes on-site day care preferable.

Teen parents from Zeeland, Grand Haven and Holland have attended West Ottawa through the Schools of Choice program because of Little Paws, Arendsen said.

Nicolette said he is not aware of any plans to operate Little Paws as a regional program, or to seek grants outside K-12 funding.

Baltimore houses troubled kids in offices

Tuesday, June 14, 2005

Last updated 5:50 p.m. PT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE -- The city's social service agency is housing troubled children in a downtown office building overnight where they sleep upright in plastic chairs.

Outraged child welfare advocates have lodged a complaint about the five-month-old practice with the agency's own abuse and neglect hot line.

"It's stupefying," said Mitchell Mirviss, an attorney assigned to monitor the Baltimore Department of Social Services as part of a consent decree to a long-standing civil case.

"They have protective service workers in there who see the children in this condition and they are not doing anything about it apparently," Mirviss said.

The facility has no showers, and no blankets, pillows or towels are visible, Mirviss told The (Baltimore) Sun after touring the building last week with DSS Director Samuel Chambers Jr. Mirviss said the boys sleep on plastic chairs in the lobby, while the girls sleep in another room on chairs or on one of four thin mattresses on the floor.

He said the office building is not licensed for child care, and the state appears to be violating the terms of the 16-year-old consent decree that established explicit standards of care.

But DSS officials said the building provides temporary shelter for emotionally troubled foster children, most of them teenagers, who refuse to be placed in group homes or mental institutions.

Department of Human Resources Secretary Christopher J. McCabe said the office was meant to provide 24-hour service to troubled children, seven days a week.

Word of its after-hours status spread, and now police and other social workers drop off children at all hours of the day and night.

That's not how the facility is supposed to work, McCabe acknowledged. "It is not licensed to be a drop-off center. The community has to help us to find other options and create more resources for these kids," he said.

He also said he is working with Chambers to open a licensed shelter that would accommodate children overnight if there were placement problems.

Adult home names new administrator

Monday, June 20, 2005

FOR THE SAGINAW NEWS

MIDLAND -- Mark Royer is Pinecrest Farm's new administrator, replacing Carol Speltz, who retired after 20 years.

Pinecrest is Midland County's adult foster care home.

Royer is a registered nurse, a clinical social worker and has 20 years of experience in long-term health care. He worked at the Michigan Masonic Home and Pathways in Alma and most recently was director of behavioral health services at the Ingham County Medical Care Facility. v

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Michigan Report
June 17, 2005

WELFARE CASELOAD DROPS FOR THIRD MONTH

Cash assistance cases under the Family Independence Program dropped for the third month in a row, with 78,349 cases in May.

The total caseload represented 212,268 people, also a reduction from April, when there were 78,517 cases representing 212,720 people. Those figures are also down from January, the most recent peak, with 78,587 cases and 213,144 people.

The welfare cases have remained consistent with about 34 percent reporting earned income and 57 percent being exempt from work requirements.

But food assistance program cases increased for the month to 474,309 households (1.057 million people) from 471,426 cases (1.051 million people) in April.

Childcare assistance also increased for the month to 63,699 cases representing 120,120 children from 63,209 cases (119,621 children) in April.

*Jamare Razor, guest column
The Herald-Palladium
June 20, 2005*

Calling all fathers: Step up and take responsibility

When I was asked to write about being a father (by the Readiness Center), I was at a loss for words. Not because I couldn't find anything to write about, but because I have so much to say. The difficult part for me was finding the right words to write.

Before I go any further let me briefly introduce myself. My name is Jamare Razor Sr. I am a 25-year-old young black man of valor. I live in the great city of Benton Harbor. At my local church (Reed Temple C.O.G.I.C., Pastor Philemon Reed), I am an associate minister and the leader of our youth department. I am the proud father of two sons and the blessed husband of my gorgeous wife, Kattie.

Two of the most memorable times in my life happened on July 7, 2001, at 6:18 p.m., and on Feb. 28, 2005, at 8:28 p.m., respectively, when my oldest son Jamare Razor Jr., and my baby, Kaleb Jalon Razor, were born. The reality of me having children didn't scare me, it excited me. I was excited because I have a chance to teach them what my father taught me. He taught me to love God, to be faithful to my wife, to respect my elders, and to be obedient to my parents. Now this is not all that he taught me, but for the readers sake I'll limit his teachings to these few.

God presented me with the most precious gift any one could receive, children. I take pride in being a father. Better yet, I love being a father, because being a father is rewarding. Working third shift on my job is sometimes stressful and tiring. Every night before I leave, my son and I do our secret handshake and he reminds me how much he loves me. Remembering how I left home has gotten me through many long nights. I don't take this responsibility lightly. I consider my children to be a blessing from God himself, and I dare not handle God's blessing in a disorderly fashion. I believe that when we start to look at our children in this light, we will start to appreciate our role as a parent, and what God has entrusted in our care.

It is not hard being a father, especially when you pattern your parenting after the ultimate father himself, God. I have been fathering now for four years and often times I ask myself these questions: What if I had treated my children like so many fathers today treat theirs? What if I didn't want to have anything to do with them? I wonder how their lives would be right at this very moment. I know with a certainty I would have missed some precious moments.

Like for instance when my son first said "dada," or when they stopped crying because of daddy's touch. Just the sheer thought of it brings tears to my eyes. Thankfully, my tears are turned to joy because I didn't miss it. I was there when "dada" was first uttered. I was there when they took their first steps. I was there when they needed daddy's loving embrace, and you know what? I'm still here and I'm not leaving!

Too many of our young fathers today are crying, "I'm the victim - I'm the victim!" - when in fact the real victim is that child who wishes Dad was there to support them in their activities. The real victim is that son they continue to reject. The real victim is that daughter they refuse to embrace. Your fatherless children are the real victims. I encourage you, fathers of all races, and fathers of all ages: Take care of your children. They need you!

Family reunion

*Angela E. Lackey, Midland Daily News
June 17, 2005*

It was a reunion filled with happiness, but tinged with sadness. The local Lighthouse Project celebrated seven years of finding homes for Russian orphans and helping Russian orphanages on Thursday night at The ROCK Youth Center.

The Russian adoptees are full of dreams. Two girls said they wanted to be lawyers, another is going to beauty school. Igor, the first local Lighthouse child adopted, recently left for Mexico and missionary work.

"What is your plans? Do you have a dream?" Larisa Filatova, Lighthouse operations manager and translator, asked one girl.

But for one Russian orphan, the trip to America ended in suicide. Filatova said the 17-year-old boy came to Midland and had a family who wanted to adopt him. But his Russian father would not release him, and the teen killed himself about one month ago.

"I knew that would happen without guidance," she said. "Many kids, I saw what happened to them when they go back. ...His father said no, and that was the end."

Filatova said some children are hurt if they are not adopted the first time they stay with an American family. Sometimes, she even makes excuses for the family to protect the child. It's the successes that keep her going.

"I always tell (the families), when you adopt this child, remember, you saved this child," Filatova said.

Valerie and Bob Thompson of Midland adopted nine Russian children, in addition to raising their four biological sons. Their house is filled with teenagers, and Valerie has homeschooled all of them except two children.

The local Lighthouse are taking Russian children to Wisconsin in August. Like the Midland visits, the children will get a taste of America and their hosts will get to know them. The hope is some families will want to adopt children.

Valerie Thompson said prospective parents should be flexible, able to make a commitment and have a sense of humor. She also wants Christian families.

"My purpose is still that these children are raised Christian," she said. Filatova sees it a little differently.

"Some people, they don't believe in God. They still believe in human beings," Filatova said.

There are many success stories. Tracy and Paul Kemp of Sebewaing met Jenia four years ago and adopted her soon after. The Kems also have three biological children.

"It went very well," Tracy Kemp said of Jenia's transition into their household. "You need to work through your problems before adopting. These kids have had a rough life."

Jenia was in an orphanage in the Chuvashia region of Russia. She has an older sister still in Russia. The girls lost both their mother and father. Jenia thought her life in Russia was great until she came to America.

"In Russia, I didn't have a lot of people that I knew was going to be there for me," Jenia, now 14, said.

Filatova said the plight of Russian orphans is still pretty bleak. Many end up on the street, the boys turning to crime and the girls to prostitution. The orphan population grows as layoffs increase and factories close, leaving people unable to care for children. Girl prostitutes not using protection contribute more orphans and a rise in the AIDS epidemic.

Filatova said the government is starting to encourage families to adopt, in part because about half of the 30,000 Russian children adopted in one year are adopted outside the country. But it is hard to overcome the traditional Russian belief in "tainted" genes, causing them to not want these children in their homes.

"I'm so happy we started this program," she said.

For more information, go to www.lhproject.com or contact Valerie Thompson at (989) 835-6741.

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\$500,000 pledged for shelter

Couple donates in memory of their son

*By **CHRISTINE FINGER***

Record-Eagle staff writer

June 18, 2005

TRAVERSE CITY - Harvey and Marilyn Warburton know their son Peter would have been excited about plans to create a refuge for homeless youths.

That's why the Empire couple has pledged \$500,000 to build the youth wing of the new Goodwill Inn Homeless Shelter. They made the gift in memory of their son, who died by suicide eight years ago at the age of 21.

"We feel he would have liked to have something to help young people in need," said Harvey Warburton, adding that he and his wife knew the cause was the right one when they read about plans for the new shelter.

"It kind of clicked and we said, 'That's it.'"

The youth wing, tentatively named Pete's Place, will be operated by the Third Level Crisis Center and serve adolescents between 14 and 18 years old.

It will be the first-ever licensed facility for providing emergency shelter to homeless young people, supporters said.

Peter Warburton was born in England in 1976. He grew up in Farmington Hills and frequently visited northern Michigan to fish, sail, ski and enjoy the outdoors. He was a student at Hope College at the time of his death.

Cecil McNally, Goodwill's executive director, said the facility will fill a growing need by providing emergency shelter to homeless young people.

"It's incredibly generous and a terrific tribute to their son," McNally said.

Third Level Crisis Center estimates there are about 190 homeless young people in Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Benzie and Antrim counties. Causes include poverty, parental and caretaker abuse, mental illness, substance abuse and other barriers.

Steve Hampton, Third Level's executive director, said returning youths to their immediate families is the first choice whenever possible.

The new Goodwill Inn Homeless Shelter will be located on Keystone Road in Traverse City. Plans call for construction next year. The 22,000-square-foot resource center will have 77 beds and room to expand up to 115 beds.

Experts work to create a 'great start' for children

Friday, June 17, 2005

By Pat Rombyer prombyer@citpat.com -- 768-4924

Young children in Jackson have higher mortality rates, are born smaller and are more apt to have teenage mothers when compared to the state average.

According to childhood experts, those statistics pose risks when it comes to performing well in school. And those who don't do well in school may struggle needlessly as adults.

"If we ignore those statistics, if we don't talk about poverty, single mothers or health care, then we'll continue to ignore the elephant in the room," said Mike Shore, a vice president at Consumers Energy and chairman of Success by Six, a program of the United Way of Jackson County.

To help combat those risks and other barriers to academic excellence, a group of 80 educators and child care workers gathered Thursday at an early-childhood summit at Baker College.

"Envisioning A Great Start," was organized and sponsored by the United Way, Baker College, the Community Action Agency, the Child and Parent Center, Jackson County Intermediate School District and others.

Karen Kirk, vice president of community impact for the Cape Fear, N.C., United Way was the keynote presenter.

State childhood leaders addressed the Great Start System, an early-childhood initiative promoted by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

Mary Cunningham DeLuca, director of children's programs at the Community Action Agency, highlighted Jackson's shortcomings as they related to poverty, the shortage of licensed childcare and its cost, the number of abuse and neglect cases that have resulted in children being removed from their homes and the numerous agencies and programs that already exist in the community.

"We have a strong foundation on which to develop a strategic plan," DeLuca said.

To keep the summit's momentum going, strategic planning meetings have been scheduled each month for the rest of 2005.

"We'll be looking at what areas we want to address first," Shore said.

Ginna O'Connor, outgoing director of community impact at United Way, said data also shows that Jackson is not a highly educated community.

"This community will be as successful as our children are," she said.

Lesia Pikaart, community relations manager at LifeWays, said the entire community has a stake in children's success.

"We have an investment," she said. "We all pay for every child and it's cheaper to fix them between the ages of 0 to 5 than it is when they reach middle or high school age."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 17, 2005

Governor Signs Legislation Honoring African American History *State will celebrate Juneteenth, Sojourner Truth Day*

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today signed legislation honoring two important pieces of African American history. Senate Bill 384 (PA 48) officially designates the third Saturday in June as Juneteenth National Freedom Day and November 26 as Sojourner Truth Day in Michigan.

"I am honored to officially declare Juneteenth National Freedom Day and Sojourner Truth Day in Michigan," said Granholm. "These days will call us each year to celebrate freedom and to honor the heroic men and women who fought to ensure that the principles of liberty and equality apply to everyone."

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the end of slavery in America. The first festivities, held 140 years ago in Galveston, Texas, were a spontaneous celebration of the news that Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation, giving slaves their freedom. The news didn't reach Texas until more than two years after Lincoln's actions, but the delay didn't dampen the festivities. Michigan is the 18th state to officially recognize Juneteenth as a state holiday. Celebrations are planned in communities across Michigan this weekend.

"Juneteenth is a celebration of African American history and culture," said Senator Martha G. Scott who sponsored the legislation. "It is important that we promote understanding, freedom and a strong sense of community."

Sojourner Truth was born a slave in the late 18th century. After escaping the bonds of slavery, Truth became a tireless advocate for freedom and equality, once meeting with President Lincoln in her quest for economic opportunities for newly-freed slaves. Truth settled in Battle Creek in 1858 where she began a job placement program to match former slaves with job openings in the area.

"Sojourner Truth is a hero in my community, and this recognition is long overdue," said Senator Mark Schauer, who has long advocated for a day honoring the legendary woman. "Because of this new law, each November 26 will be set aside for us to remember Sojourner Truth's courage and eloquence on behalf of the rights and dignity of all people."

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Executive Staff
Karen Stock

(from Marianne Udow)

Week



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Governors Testify on Medicaid Recommendations

On June 15, Virginia Gov. Mark Warner (D) and Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee (R), chair and vice chair respectively of the National Governors Association (NGA), testified before congressional committees on NGA's Medicaid reform recommendations. The recommendations covered enhancing quality and reducing costs in the overall health care system; strengthening employer-based and other forms of private health care coverage; slowing the growth of Medicaid long-term care; and state contributions to the Medicare drug benefit. Recommendations included judicial reforms to let states manage locally the optional Medicaid categories; cost-sharing provisions to let states establish enforceable premiums, co-pays, and deductibles; use of electronic medical records and technology; and federal tax credits for small businesses to modify health plans and purchase health insurance. Warner and Huckabee appeared before the Senate Finance Committee on June 15, where committee members raised a number of questions about the proposals. Committee Chair Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) asked the governors how, with respect to their proposal to limit formularies, they could reconcile increasing rebates with limiting access to brand-name drugs. Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) expressed concern that NGA's proposed higher copayments and cost-sharing could result in recipients not getting the care they need. Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), a leader in the efforts to form a bipartisan Medicaid commission, stated that he did not want to see Medicaid reform hurt those the program is intended to help. Smith criticized cuts made in the Oregon Medicaid program in 2003, saying that costs saved in Medicaid were merely shifted to hospitals, providers, and private insurers in the state. Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) asked whether NGA would support legislation adjusting the federal matching assistance percentage to better reflect true financial circumstances in the states. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) expressed concern that under the Medicaid Modernization Act (MMA) clawback provision, states are being penalized for being able to secure better deals on drug purchasing than the federal government. Grassley concluded the hearing by announcing that the committee will hold a two-day hearing on Medicaid prescription drug fraud and abuse on June 27 and 28. Testimony from the hearing is available on the Finance Committee web site at <http://finance.senate.gov/sitepages/hearings.htm>; more details on the NGA proposal, *Medicaid Reform: A Preliminary Report*, are at <http://www.nga.org/>. Warner and Huckabee also testified at a hearing before the House Energy and Commerce Committee, chaired by Rep. Joe Barton (R-Tex.). Committee members expressed concerns similar to those raised in the Senate hearing. In addition, Rep. Nathan Deal (R-Ga.), chair of the panel's Health Subcommittee, focused on Medicaid fraud and abuse and the

additional costs associated with the expansion of Medicaid coverage. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) noted that 40 percent of Medicaid costs are associated with dual-eligibles, and expressed concern over the burden that states will endure with the clawback, the disabled population, and the declining federal match rate. Other comments covered the high number of Medicaid waivers and ways to simplify the program; state drug-purchasing pools; and the need for state flexibility for children whose Medicaid eligibility changes to the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Testimony from the House hearing is available at <http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/06152005hearing1550/hearing.htm>.

House Appropriations Committee Marks Up Labor-HHS Spending Legislation

On June 16, the House Appropriations Committee passed the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education spending legislation for fiscal year 2006. The measure was almost identical to that passed by a panel subcommittee on June 9 (see *This Week*, June 10). It includes \$459.5 billion in mandatory spending and \$142.514 billion in discretionary spending. The legislation is expected to be brought up on the House floor in the near future.

House Appropriations Subcommittee OKs HUD Bill

On June 15, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia approved FY 2006 spending for programs under the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The measure provided overall HUD funding at \$37.5 billion, \$1.54 billion above the FY 2005 level and \$4.32 billion above the administration's request. Funding for Section 8 programs was split into two accounts: Section 8 vouchers are funded at \$15.53 billion, \$765 million over last year's amount and \$314 million below the administration's request, while funding for the renewal of vouchers was increased by \$735 million to restore last year's reduction. The subcommittee also provided \$5.1 billion for Project-Based Rental Assistance; \$6.8 billion for Public and Indian Housing programs (including \$600 million for the Native American Housing Block Grants); \$1.9 billion for the HOME Investments Partnership; \$1.34 billion for homeless programs; \$285 million for Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS; \$741 million for Elderly Housing; and \$238 million for Housing for Persons with Disabilities. The panel rejected a proposal to cut funding for assistance to victims of HIV/AIDS or eliminate funding for the construction of facilities for low-income disabled persons. The committee also rejected the administration's proposal to transfer the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from HUD to the Commerce

Department. The approved measure provides \$4.2 billion for CDBG, of which \$3.86 billion will be distributed in formula funds to entitlement communities and states, a reduction of \$250 million from last year.

Senators Eye Medicaid Value Purchasing Programs

Senator Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) and Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) have announced health information technology (HIT) legislation that would link quality with health care providers' reimbursement. The bill, the "Health Technology to Enhance Quality Act of 2005," would permit states to use Section 1115 waivers to develop "Medicaid value-based purchasing programs," which would let states electronically exchange claims and other health information to report quality-of-care measures. The bill would create \$125 million in annual grants to local and regional collaborations of hospitals, doctors, health plans, and other providers to develop HIT standards, as well as creation of Medicare value-based purchasing pilots to encourage the linkage of provider payments to quality of services delivered or pay-for-performance.

CMS Guidance Requires Coverage Of Certain Categories of Drugs

On June 13, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued guidance on its MMA listserve requiring coverage of certain classes of drugs within Medicare Part D drug plan formularies. Specifically, CMS will require in its formulary review process that "all or substantially all" of the drugs in the antidepressant, antipsychotic, anticonvulsant, anticancer, immunosuppressant, and HIV/AIDS categories are covered. This policy is in response to concerns that individuals currently taking certain medications within these categories often cannot easily switch to other related medications in a medically responsible manner. CMS noted that "interruption of therapy in these categories could cause significant negative outcomes to beneficiaries in a short timeframe."

Early Learning Opportunities Act Grants Available

On June 15, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) announced a request for applications for FY 2005 Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) grants. ELOA funds are awarded to Local Councils with membership composed of representatives of local child care agencies and other organizations related to early learning; parents; and key community leaders. The grants' purpose is to help communities increase, support, expand, and improve coordination of early learning opportunities. Letters of intent are due June 30, and applications are due July 15. An estimated 30 to 55 grants totaling \$35.7 million will be awarded. The notice was published in the June 15 *Federal Register* (70 FR 34775-34788) and is available at <http://www.gpoaccess/fr/index.html>.

ACF Requests Comments on Child Abuse And Neglect Data Collection

On June 13, ACF announced its intention to collect data for the fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect. Data will be obtained on cases investigated between September 4, 2005, and January 3, 2006. The Office of Management and Budget is required to make a decision concerning this data collection request within 30 to 60 days. The notice was published in the June 13 *Federal Register* (70 FR 34130-34131), and is available online at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

ACYF Announces Funding on Infant Abandonment, Supervisory Training

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) has announced two funding opportunities. Funds for abandoned infant comprehensive demonstration projects are available to develop and implement programs of support services to prevent the abandonment of infants and young children in hospitals, particularly those with chronic illnesses or special needs. A total of \$2.85 million is available in this grant cycle. Eligible applicants include state and county governments, institutions of higher education, Native American tribes, and nonprofit organizations. Grantees must provide at least 10 percent of the total approved cost of the project. Applications are due August 12; the notice was published in the June 13 *Federal Register* (70 FR 34131-34142), and is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>. Funds are also available to train public child welfare agency supervisors with the goal of strengthening the supervision of staff interaction with older youth (ages 16-21) either in foster care or in independent living programs. A total of \$1 million in grant funding is available. Grantees must provide at least 25 percent of the total approved cost of the project. State and county governments, nonprofits, institutions of higher education, and independent school districts are eligible to apply; applications are due August 5. The notice was published in the June 16 *Federal Register* (70 FR 35087-35097), and is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

New Human Service Commissioners and Administration Transitions

Periodically, *This Week* provides updates of new human service commissioners and secretaries. Judge James Payne was named director of the Indiana Department of Child Services, a new stand-alone department. In Washington State, Gary Weeks was named director of the Department of Labor and Industries, while Cheryl Stephani has been appointed assistant secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration. Brian Johnston has been named interim director of the Oregon Department of Human Services, and Kurt Knickrehm, director of the Arkansas Department of Human Services, will leave his post at the end of the month. Knickrehm will be replaced by his deputy, John Selig. In Kentucky, Mike Robinson, director of the Department for Community-Based Services, has announced his retirement. In the Bush administration, Sidonie "Sydney" Squier has been named director of the Office of Family Assistance; she has worked in Florida and Texas, and is a former member of the National Association of State TANF Administrators' Executive Committee.



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